CHAPTER - 8

AGRARIAN INEQUALITY AND POWER STRUCTURE
Both structurally and functionally inequality is an inevitable and immutable feature of any society regardless of its complexities. It is not merely a matter of individual abilities and aptitudes; it is above all a social fact (Betelie 1969: 15). Generally people are characterised with reference to both objective differences viz. sex, age, physical strength, etc. and social differences viz. roles and positions associated with age, kinship and occupation. Thus, differentiation is the inherent attribute of human conditions (Dahrendorf 1968) and society can only be defined with reference to it (Davis 1942, 1949, Davis and Moore 1945, Parsons 1975). Social inequality, Berreman observes, is the social evaluation of whatever differences are regarded relevant in a given society or situation, and that dominance goes with it (1981: 8). The issue of agrarian inequality has two facets: distributive and relational. While the former refers to the ways in which different factors such as land, income, wealth, education etc. are distributed in a given population, latter stands for the ways in which individuals or groups differentiated by these criteria are linked to each other within a system. The present chapter is organised into two sections: the first section tries to unleash the existing genesis of agrarian inequality and the second section examines how these differences are tied to the power structure.

From the earlier chapter it is evident that Mahakhand is no more a homogeneous village. There exists remarkable inequality among the villagers. Land ownership structure, labour use pattern, the access to the formal and informal credit markets along with caste system provided the basis for such unequal relationships.
The households of the village can be classified into four major distinguishable classes which are not essentially watertight categories. As it has been pointed out earlier, the class position of each household is determined, taking the rate of exploitation \( R \) into account. But in some cases identification of class position through \( R \) becomes problematic. For example, there is one household in the village with an old man and old woman only who own 0.80 acres of land. Since they are incapable of working in the field, they get their land cultivated by hiring in labour services. Automatically \( R \) in such case becomes extremely high which places it in rich peasant category. This occurs because labour does not cover all the facts of agrarian economy. Due to this reason classes are not identified mechanically in terms of \( R \), but due attention is also given to two other attributional factors: the size of landholding and the extent of formal and informal indebtedness keeping in the mind the following framework.

(a) **Landlord** is he who has the ability to generate surplus through farm labourers without participating in production process. The surplus is used for reproduction only, but for not expanded reproduction.

(b) **Rich peasant** is he who generates surplus through hiring in labour and self-participation, of which a part is reinvested for expanded reproduction.
(c) Middle peasant is he who possesses the ability to subsist and reproduce only. Neither he hires in or hires out labour and utilise the family labour to raise subsistence.

(d) Small peasant is he who is incapable of subsisting and reproducing without the expansion of the scope of exploited existence through labour market.

(e) Agricultural labour is he who is unable to reproduce itself even after participating in the wider exploitative network of labour market.

As per the above criterion, landlords as a distinct class are non-existent in Mahakhand. After canal irrigation, absentee landlordism is rare and the households of the village including the Brahmins show an increasing interest in cultivation and almost all are directly or indirectly participating in the production process.

Rich Peasants:

In Mahakhand this group is composed of Brahmins, Dumals, Gouds and Andhraite Kamas with 1, 6, 1 and 4 households, respectively. Consisting only 12 households with 11.9% of the population they control 42.3% of the village land. Almost all of them own land amounting to more than 15 acres with an average holding of 21.6 acres in which the percapita holding amounts to 2.84 acres. Almost all of them directly participate in the agricultural work. The only Brahmin household of this class supervises and never
HOUSEHOLDS OF PEASANT CATEGORIES

Figure 2

Rich Peasant (6.3%)

Middle Peasant (19.6%)

Agril. Labourers (50.8%)

Small Peasant (23.3%)
works in the field. The peasants of this class have a firm belief that their constant participation is required to guide the labourers because the latter always look for opportunities to cheat the former. The women and children rarely work in the field. Their average working days in their own land comes to 128 days. They depend largely upon the hired-in labour. Most of them employ attached labourers like guti, in addition to the casual labourers.

**TABLE No. - 37**  
Structure of Agrarian Inequality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI No.</th>
<th>Rich (n=12)</th>
<th>Middle (n=37)</th>
<th>Small (n=44)</th>
<th>Total (n=96)</th>
<th>Total (n=189)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landownership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Percentage of total land occupied.</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>(613.354)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Average land holding in acres</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Per capita land holding in acres</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.696</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Labour use

| | Average hired in labour days | | | | |
| | Average labour days in own land | | | | |
| a) Average hired in labour days | 786 | 392 | 181 | 18 | 177(33628) |
| b) Average labour days in own land | 128 | 206 | 284 | 33 | 131(24831) |
| c) Average rate of exploitation | 6.1 | +.86 | -.01 | -.84 | -.106 |
Distribution of Land Among the Peasant Categories (in percentage)

% of Total Land Occupied

Rich Peasant | Middle Peasant | Small Peasant | Agril. Labourers

Figure 3
Average Rate of Exploitation of Peasant Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peasant Categories</th>
<th>Average Rate of Exploitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rich Peasant</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Peasant</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Peasant</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agri. Labourers</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4
### 3. Indebtedness

a) Formal

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Percentage of the households indebted</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>36(68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Average indebtedness (Rs.)</td>
<td>19430</td>
<td>5632</td>
<td>2202</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Perhead indebtedness (Rs.)</td>
<td>2220</td>
<td>1063</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Informal

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Percentage of households indebted</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>51.3(97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Average indebtedness (Rs.)</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>1247</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Perhead indebtedness (Rs.)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Income

a) Average income (Rs'00) | 540 | 190 | 90 | 30 | 107(20350) |

b) Per capita income (Rs'00) | 60 | 35 | 18 | 7 | 23 |

### 5. Education

a) Unlettered % | 39.1 | 52.0 | 56.4 | 68.2 | 58.2(513) |

b) Upto 5th standard % | 267 | 29.6 | 36.2 | 28.2 | 30.3(267) |

c) Upto HSC % | 22.8 | 15.3 | 6.0 | 3.6 | 9.1(80) |

d) Above HSC % | 11.4 | 3.1 | 1.4 | - | 2.4(21) |

### 6. Types of House

a) Pucca % | 66.7 | 2.7 | - | - | 4.8(9) |

b) Mixed % | 25.0 | 37.8 | 13.6 | 19.8 | 22.2(42) |

c) Kutcha % | 8.3 | 59.5 | 86.4 | 80.2 | 73(138) |
Indebtedness of Peasant Categories to Informal and Formal Credit Agencies

Figure 5

Indebtedness of household

% of household indebtedness

Rich Peasant  | Middle Peasant  | Small Peasant  | Agril. Labourers

FORMAL AGENCIES  | PEASANT CATEGORIES  | INFORMAL AGENCIES

Figure 5
7. Percentage of households producing cash crops  
   | 100 | 59.4 | 25.0 | Nil | 23.8(45) |

8. Percentage of households selling agricultural produce.  
   | 100 | 70.2 | 31.8 | 4.2 | 29.6(56) |

9. Average fertilizer consumption (in quintals)  
   | 43.6 | 8.4 | 3.5 | .33 | 5.4(1017.2) |

10. No. of tractors owned.  
    | 4   | -   | -   | -   | (4)     |

11. No. of pumps  
    | 8   | 5   | 3   | -   | (16)    |

12. Average no. of cattles  
    | 7.6 | 3.8 | 2.9 | 4.3 | 2.1(403) |

Note: Figures in parenthesis refer to the absolute numbers.

On an average their hired in labour days constitute 786 days which predominates the household labour. Thus, their average rate of exploitation stands at 6.1, which shows that they are the chief exploiting group of the village.

This group has greater access to the formal credit institutions. Of the total households, 75% are loanees of formal credit institutions with average and per head indebtedness of Rs.19430/- and Rs.2220/- respectively. Most of them are the beneficiaries of credit facilities provided by banks. The long term loans are largely incurred by them. In contrast, their indebtedness to the informal credit agents is very low. It is only 8.3% with average amount of indebtedness of Rs.208/- and per head indebtedness of Rs.23/- . Paradoxically, with an high
indebtedness to formal credit institutions, these households also provide loans to the poor peasants and landless agricultural labourers on an exorbitant rate of interest. Because of their large dependency on hired-in labour, they tie the labourers through credit mechanism to avoid the uncertainty of labour availability during peak periods. They claim that they are the most liberal employers for the labourers and express the view that the labourers are not as loyal as they should be. Besides the agricultural dependency, some persons of this class are also employed in salaried jobs. Many of them also have milch cows from which they earn a significant portion of the income. On the whole their average household income comes to 54 thousand with per capita income of 6 thousand rupees per annum.

There are four tractors in the village which are entirely owned by this class. Of the total lands owned by these households, 65% is cultivated by using tractors. They control the highest number of pump sets (8) and cattle heads (7.6%). They are basically interested in market oriented production. All of them produce cash crops and sell a main portion of the produce to the traders in the nearby market. Apart from this, they are also able to store surplus produce for a subsequent bad year. About half of the total quantum of fertilizer consumed by the village is used by this group with an average consumption of 43.6 quintals. A similar pattern is also noticed as regards the consumption of pesticides and chemicals.
Though the educational attainment of the village in general is poor, this class represents with 39.1% of unlettered persons and 26.7%, 22.8% and 11.4% persons with education upto 5th standard, H.S.C. and above H.S.C. respectively. Most of them have greater access to the village institutions and have better links with local leaders and bureaucrats. They own better houses with more number of rooms. While 66.7% of them stay in pucca houses and 25% in mixed houses, only 8.3% have Kutcha houses.

Thus it is seen that the households belonging to this class are of the affluent section of the village with a greater command over the resources. In fact, they are the innovative, speculative and enterprising peasants of Mahakhand. They introduce the new technology and methods of cultivation, new HYV seeds and crops and continue to reinvest a larger portion of the surplus for expanded production. Due to their advantageous position they corner all the benefits of the government sponsored developmental programmes which further consolidate their socio-economic positions in and around the village.

Middle Peasants:

In the village 37 households constitute this category of which 26 belong to the Dumals, 6 to Gouds, 3 to Andhraite Kamas, and the Paps and the Kewats have one each. Comprising 22.3% of the total population they control 36.1% cultivable land of the village with an average holding of 5.9 acres and per capita
holding of .93 acre. Their average hired-in labour days is 392 man
days which is more than the average household labour days (206)
like that of the rich peasants. Some of them have attached
labourers, but unlike the rich peasants they themselves are also
hired-out by the rich peasants when their work is over. On an
average they are hired-out for 114 days. The average rate of
exploitation of labour constitutes +.86, which indicates that they
exploit more than they are being exploited. So far as indebtedness
is concerned, while 64.8% of the households are indebted to
formal credit institutions, 32.4% are loanees of the private
moneylenders. The average amount of formal indebtedness comes to
Rs.5632/- with a per head indebtedness of Rs.1063/-. In case of
the informal indebtedness, their average is Rs.208/- with a per
head indebtedness of Rs.23/-. Like rich peasants they also invest
a part of their surplus in usury.

Next to the rich peasants these households control
greater amount of income with an average of 19 thousand and per
capita of Rs.3500/-. Of the total households 59.4% cultivate cash
crops and 70.2% sell the agricultural produce. On an average their
fertilizer consumption stands at 8.4 quintals which is higher than
the village average. None of them own tractors but have 5
pumpsets. Though they do not have tractors, about 40% of their
land is cultivated by hiring-in tractor services. They also have
their own oxen but in order to avoid the delaying process during
suitable agricultural periods they prefer tractorisation. In order
to enhance their family income most of them keep milch cows. The
average cattle heads of this group comprises 3.8. The housing condition of these households is not so poor, 59.5% have Kutcha houses, 37.8% Mixed and 2.7% Pucca houses. As regards the educational attainment, about 52% are unlettered, 29.6% are educated upto 5th standard, 15.3% upto H.S.C. and the rest 3.1% are with educational qualifications more than H.S.C.

It is inferred that while this class is akin to the rich peasant, some of the households also possess the small peasant features. This is the intermediate/transitional category between the rich and the small peasants. It is distinct in its peculiar position of relative strength combined with relative weakness. These households are far stronger than the small peasants but their ambition for further expansion is thwarted by the rich peasants.

Small Peasants:
This group consists of 44 households to which the Dumals have contributed 32 households, the Gouds 4 households, and the Kewats and the Gandas 3 each. The rest two households belong to the Andhraite Kamas and the Bhandaris with one each. Constituting 24.7% of the population, they control only 16.9% of the village land with an average occupancy of 2.35 acres and per capita holding of .47 acres, which is less than that of the village figure. Since their landholding is meagre it is hardly sufficient to keep them at a subsistence level. They supplement
the family income depending largely on wage labour. A few households have also leased-in land. On the average they are hired-out for 293 days and work in their own field only for 33 days. In order to meet the large amount of labour requirements at a time during transplantation, weeding and harvesting they also hire-in labour. The average hired-in labour days is only 18 days and the rate of exploitation becomes -.01 which shows that this class is more exploited. The average income is also very less (Rs.9000/-) with a per capita income of Rs.1800/-. Due to poor economic status this class is always in deficit and this inadequacy leads them to indebtedness. As regards the extent of indebtedness 59% of the households are loanees of the Banks and Co-operatives with an average loan of Rs.2202/- and per head loan of Rs.444/-. 61.4% of the households are loanees of the private money lenders. Mention may be made that this group is more indebted to the informal credit agents than the rest of peasant categories. The moneylenders find it suitable to spread their credit net for these households with an intention of mortgaging or purchasing the small holding at a future date through exploitative debt mechanism. The average family and per head indebtedness to the informal credit agents constitute Rs.1247/- and Rs.251/- respectively.

Agricultural production is mostly at the subsistence level. Only 25% of the households devote land for cash crops and on an average 4.2% sell their produce. Through the debt mechanism
they sell a portion of the produce immediately after harvest in a pre-determined price to clear the outstanding debt burden. Paradoxically, they also purchase the produce just before harvesting when the price is high enough to meet the consumption requirements. Similarly, the fertilizer consumption of this class is low (.33 quintals). None of them have either tractors or pumpsets. They get their land cultivated largely by the ploughs. The average cattle head is 2.9 which is far more than that of the village average because they earn a portion of the income from cow rearing services. Educationally it is the most backward class next to the agricultural labourers. These families hardly bother about educating their children. Only 1.4% of the population are with qualification more than HSC and .6% and 36.2% with upto HSC and 5th standard, respectively. Rest 56.4% are unlettered. None of them own Pucca houses and 80.2% live in Kutcha houses, while 19.8% have Mixed type of houses. The houses are more congested and attached to the cowsheds.

It can be concluded that the small peasant category is also a transitional one and shows a tendency to slide down towards agricultural labourer category on account of its acute weakness of resource ownership position. The potential poverty accompanied by indebtedness of greater magnitude will push this category into that of agricultural labourers.
Agricultural Labourers:

The households of this category are drawn mainly from the untouchable castes and tribes belonging to lower economic class. Of the 96 households, the Ganda community alone have 60 such households. All the households of the Kondhs (16), Telis (4), Gonds (1), Kumbhars (1) and of the Tantis (1) have been placed into such category. The rest 14 households have been represented by the Dumals (7), Gouds (5) and the Paps (1). This group comprising more than one third of the village population control only 4.7% of the total land with an average household holding of .30 acres and per capita holding of .08 acre only. The households of this class primarily derive their livelihood from working in agricultural and allied activities as casual or attached labourers. During slack agricultural seasons they also go for road and canal construction works wherever possible. Almost all the family members including women and children are hired-out by the rich, middle and small peasants. In comparison to the average hired out labour days of the village (192) their average is extremely higher (293). Their average labour days in own land and average hired-in labour days constitute 33 and 18 days, respectively. About 50% of these households have migrated from the drought-prone areas of Bolangir and Kalahandi districts. Though they are the impoverished section of the village only 9.3% are entitled to get the credit facilities provided by the Banks and the Cooperatives. Because, on land based lending policies of the formal credit institutions only less than 1/12th of the total
amount of credit sanctioned to the village is received by them. With this, the per household and per head indebtedness amount to Rs.208/- and Rs.255/-, respectively, which is very meagre in comparison to their requirements. On the contrary, 59.4% of the households are under the clutches of the private moneylenders with per households and per head indebtedness of Rs.215/- and Rs.57/-, respectively which predominates the extent of indebtedness to formal institutions. The moneylenders prefer to lend the households of this category because due to perpetual poverty coupled with the exorbitant rate of interest, the default becomes usual which leads to the loss of mortgaged articles. In addition to this, the rich peasants have a special incentive because the credit network helps them to cement the labour tying arrangements at a predetermined wage rates. Th labourers due to lack of alternative sources are forced to surrender themselves to these land and labour hungry lenders at the time of starvation and near-starvation periods.

Because of the little control over land, their income is also low. On an average their household income comes to Rs.3000/- with a per capita of Rs.700/-, which is in sharp contrast to the village average. None of them produce cash crops and 4.2% sell the produce which should not be taken as the surplus. The selling is mainly caused by the debt conditions which again follows distress purchasing at the pre-harvesting period. Not a single household has a tractor or a pumpset but the average cattle head is 4.3 which is markedly higher than the village
average. Educationally, it is the most backward group of the village. Only 3.6% are educated upto the level of HSC, 28.2% have education upto 5th standard and the rest 68.2% constitute the unlettered population. In the special events when important decision is to be carried out, for reading and writing they entirely depend upon the rich educated pasants. Even when the written conditions are involved in credit contracts they are 'helped' by the rich. The housing conditions of this class is extremely unhygienic. Only 19.8% of the households are with Mixed type of houses which are provided to them under the Indira Abas Jojana and the remaining 80.2% live in Kutcha houses most of which are of low roofed with no windows and having small doors.

Thus, it is revealed that the households of Mahakhand do not comprise homogeneous units; they are affiliated to the differentiated categories of rich, middle and small peasants and agricultural labourers in accordance with their resource ownership position. From the above discussion it is quite apparent that capitalism in true sense of the term has not been emerged completely. It is still constrained by the pre-capitalist features. So the economy can neither be treated as purely capitalistic nor as purely feudalistic. It is their coexistence with overlapping aspects of two modes of production without endangering each other's existence. The scheme of differentiation given by Lenin (1889) from Russia, Mao (1969) from China and Utsha Pattanaik (1976) and Ashok Rudra (1971) from India do not exactly correspond to the above model.
POWER STRUCTURE

Distribution of power is often associated with the control and allocation of economic resources. The ways in which the control and distribution of economic resources promote and legitimate the status of a person by underwriting his power have been evidenced by a variety of authors (Lambert 1966, Salisbury 1966, Sahlins 1958, 1960, 1962, Bailey 1969, Carter 1975). It is man's desire for material goods that promotes the production of economic surplus and the ability to exercise power emerges as a result of acquiring control over the surplus.

In Mahakhanda, the power structure revolves basically around land, land based resources and caste. In a sense, it is just the behavioural expression of the structure of inequality described earlier. In fact, the village itself is a system of relations of inequalitarian socio-economic conditions conducive to the emergence of rich peasants. They are the largest employer of agricultural labourers with immense control over land and land based resources. It is this economic strength that they use as their political capital to control and exercise power over the villagers.

Prior to independence the power structure in Mahakhanda was founded upon the Gounti system, village Ponch and the caste councils of the respective castes. The village affairs were largely managed by the Gountia. A Ponch consisting of four members who were elected exclusively by the raiyats every three years, assist the Gountia in village administration (Hamid
The nature of right in land represented the nature and extent of power to be exercised. The power which the Gountia wielded over other groups in the village was primarily based on his judicial rights over landownership. He alone was the owner of the land and all others were his tenants. The village habitational area like grove, pasture land, ponds, etc. were under his control. Land being the property of the Gountia in the perception of the villagers, they had to pay a price for its utilisation which ranges from ceremonial gifts and offerings to regular payment in cash or kind. Apart from this, free and unpaid labour services were also provided as and when required. The caste councils were mainly responsible for the preservation of caste norms. It safeguards the commensal and connubial rules of caste, punishes the deviants and resists any threat extended towards the vital interest of caste. However, the power of the Gountia was above the caste councils and the village ponch. At times he was utterly despotic. In fact, he had a vital role to play in the village power structure and the village was relatively an autonomous unit in maintaining its power relations.

But after independence, with the introduction of adult franchise, Panchayati Raj system followed by the abolition of Gounti system and other intermediaries, the power structure of the village has become class based and the village polity became a part of the wider political system. The power and the privilege enjoyed by the individual is entered into a group of higher
socio-economic status which have accentuated the differentiation among the villagers. The abolition of Gountiship far from decreasing the power of the Gountia, extended his power from the village to the locality. His power is now no more confined to village; he takes interest in the Panchayat and State politics. The Gountia stays in Sambalpur and leaves the village affair to his youngest son. He comes to the village once or twice in a week and get apprised of the village situation. In the village he still continues to be the most respected person. It is observed that all the poor villagers irrespective of age pay a salute to him on their first visit everyday and are expected to go in a humble manner before him. It is a village norm that no body is supposed to go by a cycle or with any other vehicle when he sees the Gountia walking, either the former has to pick up him on the way or has to accompany him if the destination is common to them. The Gountia is not the member in any of the formal and informal bodies of the village, but he largely decides who would be the member. In all functions and occasions of school and club he is invited. Even in all household functions he is requested to participate and his presence is treated as privilege and pride of the concerned household. His sons also enjoy this kind prestige and honour. All the rich peasants including the Andhraite Kamas support his authority and Gountia in turn takes care of their interests and helps them in placing various positions in the formal and informal bodies of the village.
TABLE No. 38
Persons Associated With Special Positions in the Village Institutions/Associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI No.</th>
<th>Persons' Age</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Converted Land in acres</th>
<th>Rate of Exploitation of Labour</th>
<th>Credit (in Rs.)</th>
<th>Position(s) held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. AX</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Rich peasant</td>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>104500</td>
<td>Club, Jatra Committee President and Bhagabat Mandir Custodian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. BY</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Rich peasant</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>15000</td>
<td>Ponch member, Village Committee member and Village moveable asset keeper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CZ</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Rich peasant</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>Ponch member and U.P. School Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. DM</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Rich peasant</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>Ponch member, Village Committee member and Ward member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. EN</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Rich peasant</td>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>Ponch member and Milk co-op. Society's President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. FC</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Rich peasant</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>Ponch member, Village Committee member and Ward member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. GR</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Rich peasant</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55000</td>
<td>Ponch member and Milk co-op. Society's Board of Director's Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. HP</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Goud</td>
<td>Rich peasant</td>
<td>I.A.</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>9000</td>
<td>Jatra Committee's Secretary, Milk co-op. Society secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. IS</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Goud</td>
<td>Middle peasant</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. JT</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Middle peasant</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. KU</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Small peasant</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. LV</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Small peasant</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. MW</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Dumal</td>
<td>Small peasant</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. NA</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Ganda</td>
<td>Small peasant</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Names have not been mentioned due to some reasons.
It is convenient to begin an analysis of the power structure of the village by making a study of its various formal and informal institutions. The various important positions of these institutions and the socio-economic background of the persons occupying these positions is depicted in the table (No.38).

A cursory glance at the table reveals that of the 14 persons occupying vantage positions in the village institutions, 8 (55.7%) belong to the households of the rich peasant category. Except for the 4 Andhrait rich peasants all the households of the rich peasants have been represented. Each of them is holding not only a single position but also a number of positions at a time. The middle and small peasants have been included in these positions in name only with 2 and 4 persons, respectively. None from the class of the agricultural labourers have been eligible to occupy these positions. On the caste basis the Brahmins and the Dumals have maximum representation in proportion to their total number. Except the position of the Chowkidar which is exclusively meant for the Ganda caste because of its low status, none from the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been able to place themselves in the vantage position of these formal and informal institutions of the village. Thus, it is inferred from the table that in Mahakhand control over land, labour and credit along with an upper caste identity has almost become a prerequisite of control over the village level institutions. It is further inferred that
the concentration of the positions usually go with the concentration of resources.

The village runs a U.P. school in collaboration with the adjoining village of Karnapali. The school affair is directed by a managing committee with a Chairman in it. A Dumal rich peasant of Mahakhand who owns 32 acres of (converted) land and lives in a brick house is the Chairman of the School, and other members belong to the adjoining village. The teachers are mostly from adjacent villages and in order to avoid the frequent transfer problems they always keep close contact with not only the Chairman alone but also persons of similar socio-economic status. They pay special attention to their children and apprise them of their progress whenever desired. The entire village is divided into two wards and the ward members are the two rich peasants of the village. The club is managed by three young men in which Gountia's son acts as the Secretary and other two members belong to the rich peasant families with upper caste identity. All the moveable assets of the club are kept in the club house and the key is left with the Secretary. These three persons call for meetings and monitor the club works according to their desire and convenience. Similarly the management of Bhagabat Mandir is vested with the Gountia's son. The village fund and all moveable assets like utensils, petromax lights etc. are kept in the custody of a ponch member who is also a rich peasant (see table no.38). Each year in the mid November the village organises a Jatra (fair) for the
celebration of Analanavami in front of the Bhagabat Mandir. For its effective management a committee is formed with a President and a Secretary. They collect the money and distribute the work which is binding upon all. Last year the Gountia's son was its President and the Secretary was an educated rich peasant of Duma caste. The executives are congratulated over a feast organised during Jatra in which all the villagers across the ethnic identities participate. All the households of the village pay for it equally irrespective economic status and relaxation is made depending upon the discretion of the committee. If the total collection exceeds the expenditure, the surplus amount is credited to the needy households. Last year the left over amount was credited to the two respective attached labourers of the President and Secretary. In the feast the cooking is exclusively made by the Brahmin and the purity and pollution is strictly observed. Tasks which need greater physical labour are performed by the labourers within the framework of caste system. For example, the collection of fuel, carrying of luggage etc. are done by the labourers of the untouchable castes and work like carrying water, cleansing utensils, etc. is meant for the touchable labourers. The rich peasants supervise the work and also serve food to the villagers. All the villagers witness the Jatra, the members of the upper caste sit closer to the stage while the untouchables sit at an audible distance in the corner of the village street.
The milk cooperative society located at Godbhaga is managed by three villages including Mahakhand. This cooperative society is directed by a president and a secretary with a board of directors composed of 3 members. The board of directors elect the secretary and president whose term is for one year. Mahakhand has been represented in it with its president, secretary along with two members from the board of directors. Except one member who is a close associate of the president, the rest three office bearers from Mahakhand are the rich peasants who are also occupying vantage positions in other informal and formal bodies (see table No.38). The Milk Tester, who is a inhabitant of neighbouring village of Kujapali, is one of the relatives of the secretary.

Recently, as per the State Government decision, a 7 member committee has been constituted in the village to carry out the developmental work at the village level like the construction and renovation of the village roads, sinking wells, etc. A stipulated amount is sanctioned for the village and the village committee is required to invest the amount in the proposed work or can recommend an outsider to carry on the work. The committee or the recommended person after getting the work order has to start the initial phase of work from own pocket and then the amount will be reimbursed after the verification of the work done. Like this the entire amount is released through two to three instalments. In Mahakhand of the seven members three are rich peasants (one Goud
and other two Dumals) and the rest four belong to middle (1) and small peasant (3) category (all Dumals). It is important to note that none from the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribe figures here. The committee is under the domination of rich peasants and middle and small peasants have been placed only nominally. Last year the rich members asked the rest of the members to contribute a definite amount for the initial phase of work, but due to poor economic status they voluntarily refused to participate. Then these three rich peasants brought the work order on the recommendation of other members. They just repaired the old road slightly and swallowed the entire amount. The non-participant poor members got irritated over the matter and the poor youngest member from them induced the rest to complain against them in the Block office. When the matter was exposed, all the three rich members immediately rushed to his house and brought him to the village street and beat the person in public. Every body noticed it but did not protest. The Gountia arrived at the village the next day, and the fellow narrated the event before him. But the Gountia, instead of taking action against the concerned rich peasants, asked him to apologise to them for attempting to defame the village in the Block office.

The village Ponch, which is the chief judiciary organ of the village, is almost completely controlled by the rich peasants (Table no. 38). It is the principal decision making body of the village. All the conflicts and disputes within the village are
resolved by it. There are nine members of the Ponch (eight Dumas and one Goud) along with a chowkidar (of Ganda caste). The aggrieved party seeking justice from village Ponch is required to inform the chowkidar depositing Rs.5/- with him. The chowkidar informs the Ponch members and the Ponch sits in front of the Bhagabat Mandir to resolve the case. The deposited amount of Rs.5/- is taken by the chowkidar for his service and the fine imposed upon the culprit goes to the village account. It is evident from the village that the situations of conflict between the rich and the poor are always resolved in favour of the rich (case no. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12). The resolution of certain conflicts in the Ponch highlights the fact that the Ponch has often given weightage to those who belong to their class rather than to those, belonging to their ethnic groups (case No.10). In almost all cases the rich peasants dominated the Ponch and openly favoured the rich. They turn the tables according to their predetermined desire and remain indifferent to the claims of the poor. Even there are instances where not only a poor but also a group of poors have been victimised by the Ponch. Around six to seven years back, a group of labourers were punished when they did not prefer to be hired out by the rich peasants and worked in the paddy market of Godbhaga for higher wage. By this the large landowners faced enormous difficulty in hiring-in labour from village, especially during peak periods. Since it affected the interests of the rich peasants who regulated the village Ponch, a resolution was passed
in the Ponch to evict the labourers from the village Gochar lands which they were cultivating earlier. Since then the land has been leased out to a labourer, the produce of which goes to the village fund. It is interesting to note that the Ponch disallowed a public forum for free discussion and debate and the decision was binding upon the villagers. But now there has been a change and the case can be taken to the Government Court. However, because of the expensiveness of court matter the man who is poor and timid will not venture to seek justice there and it is the wealthy person who can make use of the Court (Bailey 1957: 264). In addition to this, once the poor man challenges the Ponch's decision he loses his further security and has to bear a heavy cost for it (see case No.7).

Apart from this, there are caste councils (Jati Samaj) of each caste cutting across the villages. Anybody violating the caste norm is penalised. Neither the village ponch nor any other informal bodies have a say on this matter. Even the Gountia who is the strongman of the village has practically no voice in the internal affairs of the caste council except in his own caste council. It is observed in the village that caste is often used as an ideological screen for exploitation (see case no.8). It is used by the rich for his further economic interest and interprets the authority of the power holder for perpetuating power relations.

Besides their association with the various institutions of the village, the rich peasants have greater access to the
local administrative and other offices, like Revenue Inspector's office, Block Development Officer's office, Tahasildar's office, Police stations, Banks, Cooperatives, etc. The agricultural modernization has increased villager's dependency on these institutions for solving the water management problems and the litigations arising out of it, for the regular payment of water taxes and revenue, for getting credit facilities, etc., which, in turn, increased the power of the rich peasants. Whenever a problem arises, the labourer or the small peasant does not venture to meet these officials alone. He always needs the company of a rich peasant for which he has to sacrifice a lot. It is observed that if somebody gets into trouble with any of these bureaucrats, he can count on the help of the rich peasants. It needs mentioning that whenever these officials visit the village they meet the Gountia and other persons of higher socio-economic status and get the picture of the event from them. These rich peasants also entertain the visitors well. Because of their wider network they mobilise the authorities of these institutions in their favour. For example, on the distribution of houses to the homeless under the Indira Abas Jojana Scheme, the rich peasants have manipulated the pattern of distribution.

Almost all the rich peasants are linked with formal political parties and play an active role during elections. They take interest in it because, to continue their trade, moneylending and other related activities, they need to be in the good book of
the politicians and bureaucrats. They act as important agents in mobilising the support during elections. The political leaders prefer to draw the support of these rich peasants instead of canvassing each individual because they command fairly large block of votes. The villagers locate the images of the state and national leaders through their local leaders whom they know by name, caste and economic status. The usual procedure of Mahakhand is that just before the day of election the Gountia and other rich peasants call a meeting to which three to four important persons of each pada (hamlet) are invited and an 'unanimous' decision is taken to vote for a particular candidate. The dissidents are convinced later on through minor bribe payments. However, sometimes tension and conflict arise during elections under the patronage of political parties. The political awareness among the labourers and small peasants is very low. Most of them do not have the faintest idea of local level leaders. They only know whether to vote for Biju Pattnaik or Rajiv Gandhi and identify them through symbols which are being indoctrinated by the local leaders.

To sum up, Mahakhand is structured in terms of classes. The power structure is closely linked with the economic privileges. This shows that accumulation of land and land-based assets have become the chief weapons for increasing one's power. The power relations in the village are under the command of upper class who control the economic expectations of the villagers and
exercise its power not only over the villagers but over the locality by developing its grip over the local level administrative authorities. The traditional feudal power still persists in the village and the emerging modernizing forces which could remove the feudal-colonial bases of power are, in essence, and, in practice, reinforcing and elaborating these bases. The traditional leaders managed to enter into these newly created institutions, and, were thereby enabled to appropriate the lion's share of government sponsored developmental resources which further strengthened their socio-economic status in the village.
Cases:

(7). X, a Dumal small peasant, had two patches of land adjacent to the plot of M, a rich peasant of Dumal caste and a member of the village Ponch. To meet the mortuary rites of his mother X sold one of these patches to a neighbouring villager. M was interested to purchase the land. But when the latter offered less price, X sold it to the former. This angered M. After some days he started encroaching on the other plot of X by secretly shifting its demarcated line. One day while M was shifting the line X noticed it. He immediately rushed to the spot and caught the hands of M and the latter with his sickle wounded X's eye severely. The poor X informed the Ponch. The Ponch, instead of penalizing M, imposed a fine of rs.20/- on X for initiating the attack. Challenging this, X took the matter to the Government Court and now the case is pending in the corridors of law and justice of the Court for the last two years. The Ponch members feel insulted with it and got annoyed with X. Later when X's standing crop was deliberately destroyed by M through gathering oxen, the Ponch refused to hand over the petition. Some of the members chided him and told "you inform the Court, it will help you".

(8). 'A', a Ganda by caste works as a Bhutiar with F, a Dumal rich peasant. 'A' had taken Rs.600/- as advance with the condition of repaying it through labour services. In fact, 'A' repaid the entire amount, but F tampered with the figure and
claimed that A had taken Rs.700/- and he has to pay Rs.100/-
rupees more. Since it is a matter of 100 rupees 'A' got irritated
and told F that he had written it wrongly and justified it by
recalling the previous instances. With this complaint F lost
his temper and beat A with his slippers. To escape him A
snatched away the slippers and, meanwhile, F fell down on the
ground and shouted that a Ganda beats a Dumal. Just after the
incident all the Dumals of the village united and went to 'A's
house. 'A' protected him by hiding himself in his neighbour's
house and the violent mob damaged some portion of his house.
Finally A took the help of the village Ponch in which a further
penalty of Rs.30/- was imposed upon 'A' and he has also been
advised to repay 100 rupees to F immediately.

(9). T, a rich peasant of Dumal caste and a Ponch
member encroached upon 3 decimals of land from the adjoining plot
of V, a small peasant of the same caste. When V opposed T, the
latter claimed that as per the land record a portion of his land
has been encroached upon by the former. V brought the matter to
the notice of Ponch. The Ponch empowered two persons of the
village who are most often consulted on land measurement (one of
which is a Ponch member) to settle the dispute. After measurement
they gave the decision that T was not wrong and his further
encroachment of 2 decimals was also justified.

(10). Once, 'S', an attached labourer of Ganda caste
employed with 'N', a rich Goud peasant, was syphoning water
surruptitiously on employer's direction from the land of a Goud. K, a small peasant of Dumal caste noticed it and immediately informed the Goud landowner. N was accused by the Goud landowner for this. N kept the event in mind. A patch of land of N was adjacent to K's plot and water from the former's land was drained into the latter's land. After some days when the ripened crop lay on the ground, it rained heavily. Taking this chance N ordered his labourer 'S' to close the waterway. K could not bear such damage and he attempted to open it. While he attempted to open the way N's attached labourer snatched away the short handled hoe and hurt former's head with it. Though it is an attack by a Ganda on a Dumal none of the Dumals helped K. The village Ponch picked up the issue on K's request. In the Ponch N turned the tables in his favour and K was directed to pay a fine of Rs.25/- for 'forcibly' opening the waterway instead of informing either the village Ponch or the Revenue Inspector.

(11). Q, a Pap of small peasant category, borrowed Rs.3000/- from Y, a Andhraite rich peasant on the condition of selling his land of .32 decimals in the near future. After four months Q arranged the amount and wanted to repay the debt with all its interests operative in the village. But the moneylender refused to receive the amount and insisted that Q disposes the land to him. Since Q owns a small quantum of land, he did not agree to the proposal and begged apology for his earlier condition. Y did not listen to it and forcibly took away the crop from the
proposed land. Q informed the Ponch of this. The Ponch members openly favoured the Andhraite rich peasant and ordered Q to sell the land in question to the former.

(12). 'R', a Duma rich peasant once asked 'Z', a middle peasant of the same caste, to provide his bullock for a day in order to help him out with a huge mud work. Z had a lot of work of the same type and he failed to help him. Keeping this in mind R closed the drain which goes through his land to the Z's plot the next day. Z immediately put the matter before Ponch, but it gave the verdict that it is the Revenue Inspector's affair and Ponch has nothing to say about it. Z informed the Revenue Inspector accordingly. After 15 to 20 days when the plants of the surrounding lands grew up, the Revenue Inspector came and released the water way. But Z could not cultivate the land because its ploughing would damage the plants of the adjoining plots and had to leave the land uncultivated for one season.

*The respondents have requested not to disclose their names.